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Money Managers

January 25, 2009

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Luke 16:1-13

In the spirit of big money mistakes I want to tell you about Alice Pike. She went to prison for forgery because 3 years ago she tried to pay for her Wal-Mart purchases with a \$1 million dollar bill. (After the cashier told her the 2 gift cards she had only came to \$2.32.) What was she thinking? There's no such thing as a million dollar bill. And as far as what she was thinking, I don't believe she was. Alice went to the register with \$1,675 worth of stuff. What is amazing is that she expected change. Math is not my strong suit, but by my calculation, that's a lot of change. Was Alice really expecting that the cashier not only would, but actually could, hand over \$998,325.00? Did she envision the cashier on the loudspeaker saying, 'We need 10's and 20's on aisle 5?' Did she even bring a vehicle big enough to handle her purchases and the mountain of change?' (PreachingToday.com, Citation: John Beukema, Western Springs, Illinois). I want to say "Alice, Alice. How could you?"

Our country is in a financial mess. I know the market is cyclical, but when you look at the crisis and the impact it's having in so many parts of our culture, don't you want to just say "How could we?! Are good workers that hard to find?" Take the mortgage crisis: Don't you want to look at Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac when you hear what they were allowing and say "Are good managers that hard to find?" I see congress and our money gurus and ask "How could you? Are good leaders that hard to find?" Come on, guys! Chalk it up to lots of things. I still think our number one problem is a spiritual one: Sin. This might sound judgmental or preachy or old school, but have you thought about it? The sin comes on two fronts: First, someone is coveting a house that he or she shouldn't be thinking of buying. It's beyond their means. Church, I hate to say it, but that's numero diez of the Big Ten: the 10th commandment (*Exodus 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. (!) You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."*). But the sin comes from another direction too: And that is someone who should be looking out for the weakness of his neighbor (the customer), but instead, they are sucking them into destructive (subprime) behavior. The second person is trifling with the whole of the Law Jesus says is summarized by "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" Treating them any other way is subprime. ☺ We are a nation of coveters, and there are lots of businesses designed to feed that urge in us. **We spend our whole lives trying to figure out how to have what God has not yet given us.** Aren't you just a little bit frustrated too? And we end up not even managing very well on the good stuff that we *do* have. I have to be careful, or I'll start sounding like a guy at the gym who has a regular rant to make sure we all know how hard it is to find good workers and good managers. Of course we're in a mess!

Now here's the most sobering fact: *God already knows this.* God knows better than anybody. God is the longest-term employer in our universe. God *knows* how hard it is to get good, dependable workers. It's not just those "other people" who are tied in to the current financial crisis or any other crisis. I'm thinking of myself. God called me into this, so I'm extra sensitive to God's executive problems. God knows how hard it is to find good managers. I know this because I'm one of them. And so are you. Entrusted with *so* much, but unable to make much of it.

Jesus had a sense of this, and told this crazy parable in Luke 16:1 "*Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. 2 So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'"* Jesus doesn't really say the guy was a crook. He was probably just incompetent. And so this rich man says "Clean out your desk and bring in your books. This is your last week."

3 "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg'. The guy does a quick self-analysis. (Maybe it's the first one in a long time). Maybe he's old, or maybe he's been going easy on himself. When it comes to digging, maybe he's out of practice. But his self-esteem leads him away from begging. So he comes up with a plan:

4 *I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.* 5 "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 6 "Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied."The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.' 7 "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' "A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied."He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'" (Can you say "bailout?") ☺ This guy's plan isn't ethical, but it's effective. And we don't know if he's honestly trying to help his master by getting people to at least pay something, or if he's rearranging the books to help some of the debtors in the hopes that they'll help him (or be blackmailed later). Either way, he's making friends with those debtors so that maybe they'll take him in. Either way, he's headed for trouble with his master.

And here's the shocking part of Jesus' story: 8 "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. 9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings." Crazy! The Message paraphrases it like this: "The master praised the crooked manager! Why? Because he knew how to look after himself. Streetwise people are smarter in this regard than law-abiding citizens. They are on constant alert, looking for angles, surviving by their wits. Jesus is saying "I want you to be smart in the same way—but for what is right—using every adversity to stimulate you to creative survival. Concentrate your attention on the bare essentials, so you'll live, really live, and not complacently get by on good behavior."

10 "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. 11 **So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?** 12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?" You may feel like you've only been entrusted with a little, but in God's eyes, that little bit is the indicator of how you would handle things of God! Little or much (and remember, compared to the world, how much you've been given), Jesus meant for you and me to see ourselves in his stories.

Jesus concludes this story by saying 13 "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." And here we are, the richest society in the history of humanity. Church, how are we managing?

Well, the rich man represents God. God is for sure the richest landowner we know. And God has subcontracted all His riches to manage: to you, to me, to your next door neighbor, the entrepreneur, the entertainer, the guy asking for food at the State St. exit, the athlete, the high school student, the teacher, the farmer. We're the managers. Whether we realize it or not. Whether you know you're under contract or not. You make decisions every day about our universe, our relationships, our resources, and yourself: your time, your abilities, your service, your money, your personality. You and I are the managers. In Jesus' parable, someone brought charges against him. Talk about a wake up call! And it was too late. The office of management was being taken away. So first, wake up! You've been given so much! And God is trusting you to manage it for Him. So face reality, and set a regular time for your management strategy. Chances are, if you're like me, you've squandered, frittered, or socked away the exact thing God probably meant for you to share. This church's vision is to equip each of us, that our lives would be transformed and we would reach thousands of people with the Good News. What can that equipping look like? I want to invite RICK NORTHRUP to share part of his story with us this morning...

And hear the shockingly good news: All was not lost. And Jesus said the master was pleased. An undeniable theme in scripture is that God will call all of us to some sort of accounting or judgment. God's sense of economy is so great that every dead leaf and waste is used to replenish the earth's soil. God will ask "What

have *you* done with the goods and gifts I lent you?" Have you used these resources to bless others, or have you squandered them in building some petty kingdom for yourself? You can't serve both, or you'll end up slave to the wrong one.

Jesus said "*For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.*" What if God watched the Olympics? He surely would have seen those athletes and said "I wish some of *my* followers would strive that passionately. I wish they'd break a few records." Or when God sees an entrepreneur working feverishly to get a better idea than her competitor, I wonder if He says "I wish my Sunday school teachers or preachers worked that hard in competing for the souls of their students." In God's economy, there is something you, and only you can do. It starts with an inventory of your own conduct and what was entrusted to you. And you get creative. You use your gifts and talents and resources for God's work. You make things happen. This week, God wants you and me to use our creativity. Use your imagination. Use your determination—for Him! In your relationships. In your resources. In your rebuilding of His Kingdom. Make it the way it was supposed to be! Imagine if all of us poor managers received this wake up call, and served God with our time, our talents, and our treasures. (Some ideas for this sermon are from "More Parables from the Backside" by Ellsworth Kalas).